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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

Militarism and American Foreign Policy: A Matter of Balance

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Introduction

How could any serious student at the National War College assert that militarism is on the rise in American foreign policy in today's political environment characterized by military over-utilization, decreased combat readiness, and poor service retention? The obvious absurdity of this assertion demonstrates the subtlety of the challenge facing our system of government. Driven by systemic imbalances within the Constitutional and bureaucratic structures of the federal government, this militarism has profound implications for America's place in the international community, as well as its global leadership role in the coming century.

This is not a warning, however, of impending extra-constitutional action by the US armed forces. Instead, the rising militarism in American foreign policy is an unanticipated result of the profound effectiveness and professionalism of the uniformed military in today's fiscally constrained national security environment. It is also the unintentional byproduct of incremental refinements to the National Security Act of 1947. This discussion is particularly relevant because both Presidential candidates are championing budgetary increases for the Department of Defense. Unless this increased support is accompanied by a realignment of the national security bureaucracy, such increases will exacerbate these systemic imbalances, unintentionally fueling the dynamic responsible for this increased militarism.

Militarism in this context has three distinct aspects. The first, often described as militarization, is an increase in the quantity and proportion of resources a society devotes to military affairs. Its second aspect deals with changes in cultural behavior associated with the military at the individual, group, and organizational level. The third aspect deals with the

implementation of national policy, including the propensity for and frequency of military interventions.[1]

The Warping of Checks and Balances

James Madison wrote over two hundred years ago, "It will not be denied that power is of an encroaching nature and that it ought to be effectually restrained from passing the limits assigned to it."[2] Madison argued strongly that the best restraint for the abuse of power was Montesquieu's concept of divided government. As a result, for two centuries a government divided by creative tension and competition has been the American safeguard against tyranny.[3] With the periodic assistance of the Supreme Court, the Constitution and its amendments have perpetuated competitive balance at the highest levels of our government. Extending this ideal to intra-branch organizational design, both the Congress and the President have used competition to limit the abuse of power within the branches as well.[4] The causes and solutions to today's increasing militarism in US foreign policy are found in the essence of this balanced competition.

The factors affecting all three aspects of militarism in America can be categorized into two types: those stemming from Constitutional imbalances between the executive and legislative branches of government, and those resulting from bureaucratic imbalances within the branches themselves. Scholar Edwin Corwin described the Constitution as "an invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy."[5] However, events such as the Cold War and

[1] Hubert P. Van Tuyll, "Militarism, the United States, and the Cold War," *Armed Forces and Society* 20 (Summer 1994): 519.
[2] *The Federalist Papers*, no. 48 (New York: The New American Library, 1961), 308.
[3] *The Federalist Papers*, no. 47 (New York: The New American Library, 1961), 301.
[4] For a detailed discussion of this ideal see Terry M. Moe and William G. Howell, "Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 20 (Dec 1999): 850-872.
[5] Edwin Corwin, *The President: Office and Powers* (New York: New York University Press, 1940), 200, cited in Richard Haass, "Congressional Power: Implications for American Security Policy," Adelphi Paper 153 (London: IISS, 1979), 4.

its demise, as well as technological developments have caused this struggle to assume a new form in the latter half of the 20th century.

Constitutional Imbalances

The Constitutional imbalance of greatest significance is the growing strength of the President vis-à-vis Congress. Manifesting itself in the third aspect of militarism--the implementation of national policy--the President increasingly has taken on powers not clearly delineated in the Constitution. In fact, the modern American presidency is defined by the Chief Executive making law on his own through unilateral action.[6] This is possible because:

> [Presidents] have at their disposal a tremendous reservoir of expertise, experience, and information, both in the institutional presidency and in the bureaucracy at large. These are critical resources the other branches can never match, and they give presidents a huge strategic advantage-in the language of agency theory, an information asymmetry of vast proportions-in pursuing the myriad opportunities for aggrandizement that present themselves in the course of governmental decision making.[7]

There is no better example of this than the power to conduct military operations other than war.

The Founding Fathers understood the need for a strong Chief Executive to react to immediate threats to the nation's security, yet they expressed trepidation over empowering the President to bring the country to war. When Constitutional Convention delegate Pierce Butler from South Carolina moved to vest war power with the president, not one of his colleagues seconded the motion.[8] Almost all agreed with George Mason of Virginia, who spoke "against giving the power

[6] Terry M. Moe and William G. Howell, "Unilateral Action and Presidential Power: A Theory," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 20 (Dec 1999): 850-872.
[7] Ibid., 850-872.
[8] James M. Lindsay, "'Congress and the Use of Force in the Post-Cold War Era", in *The United States and the Use of Force in the Post-Cold War Era* (Washington DC: The Aspen Institute, 1995), 73 cited in Robert Zoellick, "Congress and the Making of US Foreign Policy," 20-41.

of war to the Executive" because the president "is not [safely] to be trusted with it."[9] However, since 1789, the President has ordered the use of US military force without Congressional sanction in about 200 cases, while Congress has declared war only on five occasions.[10] Moreover, the information revolution of the late 20th century has accelerated the pace of this assumption of power. Technology has placed the decision cycle of the President well inside that of Congress with the availability of real-time information, and the capability to respond globally within hours to a crisis. The framers of the Constitutional Convention never envisioned a time when the rapidity of foreign policy decisions would surpass the time required to consult Congress. It has been this development, in particular, that has permitted the more frequent use of the military by the President in the implementation of national policy.[11]

Intra-Branch Imbalances

Congressional Focus on Defense. Within the legislative branch, the imbalance that is contributing to increased militarism in American foreign policy relates to the advent of the "new Congress" of the 1970s. Referred to as the 'democratization' of Congress, new members dismantled many of the mechanisms devised over decades to centralize Congressional authority. While the numbers of staff soared, the influence of Congressional leadership, committee chairs and seniority was diluted.[12] While decentralization increased the relative influence of the individual, it also shifted emphasis to narrow issues and short-term objectives without attention to trade-offs within an integrated policy towards budgets, countries or problems.[13] Narrow

[9] Louis Fisher, *Presidential War Power* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 4-8 cited in Robert Zoellick, "Congress and the Making of US Foreign Policy," 20-41.

[10] Robert Zoellick, "Congress and the Making of US Foreign Policy," *Survival* 41 (Winter 1999/2000): 20-41.
[11] Ibid., 20-41.
[12] Ibid., 20-41.
[13] Ibid., 20-41.

topics reflecting individual, local or constituent interests became more prevent.[14] As a result, the restricted fiscal environment of the late 20th century, coupled with decentralization, has led Congress into micromanaging the authorization and appropriation process for the Defense Department. While this attention and its resultant initiatives such as the Quadrennial Defense Review are a source of frustration for DoD, in fact this attention has ensured that the military receives the lion share of Congressional attention. With constituency-based agendas increasing in importance since 1970, today's Congressmen and staffers more readily focus their attention on Defense issues relating to their district, rather than funding far-away embassies or diplomatic initiatives. In this context, it should not be surprising that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reported in 1998 that the U.S. spent more money, as a percentage of GDP, on defense than it did on international affairs by a factor of eighteen.[15] Moreover, on average over the past 40 years, the U.S. has spent five times more on defense outlays for operations and maintenance than it did on international affairs. (See Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix A.) This investment strategy of concentrating budgetary emphasis on coercive tools of statecraft to the relative exception of diplomatic and persuasive tools has likely contributed significantly to the increased militarism in American foreign policy.

The Cost of Being All You Can Be. The imbalance within the executive branch stems from the second aspect of militarism, cultural behavior. However, the cultural differences contributing to militarism go beyond those recently described by former Secretary of the Navy James Webb who stated:

[14] Ibid., 20-41.
[15] Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government: Historical Tables* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1998), 42-54.

> The elites of this country have been separating themselves from the obligations of serving and have less and less comprehension of the military. As a result, they have more of a cavalier view of how the military should be used.[16]

Instead of being the victim of cavalier elitism, today's military is suffering from the bureaucratic consequences of being the premiere tool of the US foreign policy apparatus. Benefiting from over two decades of an all-volunteer force, never before has the Republic been served by such highly qualified soldier-statesmen. Often outnumbering their colleagues in the interagency process, no other organization in the executive branch has refined and demonstrated the characteristics of planning, flexibility of response, and successful accomplishment of objectives as today's military. These achievements appear all the more stark when compared to the struggles of a chronically under-funded Department of State entrenched in a culture that rewards risk aversion and lacks an effective formal grooming program for its leadership.

In addition to its budgetary preeminence over other executive branch departments, the military's interaction with Congress has yielded legislation giving the armed forces even greater say in the interagency process. The Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, commonly known as Goldwater-Nichols, has achieved its purpose of minimizing "parochial protection of individual service interests."[17] However, Goldwater-Nichols also serves as the best example of legislation fostering increased militarism. By strengthening the Office of the Chairman and the Joint Staff that supports him, Congress has unintentionally created the most effective bureaucratic organization in the government. Mandating intensive introspection and planning processes such as the QDR, no other department better understands its goals and how to achieve them. Through the power of intellect, initiative, and discipline, the Joint Staff has given

[16] Interview with James Webb, *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 126 (Apr 2000): 78.
[17] Peter J. Roman and David W. Tarr, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff: From Service Parochialism to Jointness," *Political Science Quarterly* 113 (Spring 1998): 91-111.

the US military a greater role in the development and implementation of American foreign policy than ever before in the country's history.

Amplifying this imbalance further has been the refinements made to the Unified Command Plan. Through interaction with the Unified Commanders (CINCs) around the world, the Chairman can profoundly influence the civilian leadership in the Pentagon, the White House, and on Capitol Hill. Occasionally taking on the aura of military viceroys, the CINCs wield enormous diplomatic power in their respective theaters. Because the leadership of the Department of State has chosen to remain Washington centric, the CINCs are in a unique position to affect regional foreign policy. In many regions of the world, the preeminent US diplomat is a four-star military officer. By definition, this is an example of the militarism challenges facing America today.

While operationally a peer of the US Ambassadors assigned to countries in his area of responsibility (AOR), the dispersion of diplomatic power among several foreign capitals is no match for the institutional prowess of a CINC and his staff. Moreover, few would attempt to convince a regional CINC that their bureaucratic co-equal is an Assistant Secretary of State in Washington. While each CINC has a State Department political advisor assigned to his command, Foggy Bottom remains at a significant bureaucratic disadvantage when the CINC chooses to be involved in the implementation of foreign policy in his AOR. As a result, the Unified Command Plan serves as a hallmark of American militarism today.

The Implications of Increasing Militarism in America

Everything Looks Like a Nail

Increased militarism in American foreign policy has both domestic and international implications. Domestically, a continued rising tide of militarism will lead to the further

contraction of non-coercive tools of statecraft. Over the last decade as the cooperative and persuasive tools of statecraft have atrophied, the Executive Branch has increased its reliance on coercive tools supplied by the military. A wise man once said, "When the only tool you have is a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail." Thus if America continues to spend more on defense than all of its diplomatic and economic international initiatives combined, then it should not be surprised when the military is used with increasing frequency. This translates to a continuation in high operational tempos, additional worldwide deployments for peacekeeping, and a continuation of sporadic military operations other than war. While the implications of this behavior are of significant concern in the military, its international ramifications are more profound.

The Fallacy of the Benevolent Hegemon

National Security Advisor Samuel R. Berger acknowledged in the Washington Post on October 31, 1999 that the United States is seen in Europe, Russia and China as "a hectoring hegemon," a country that is "unilateralist and too powerful." Berger argued that the US was, instead, a "benign hegemon" that promotes "the greater good" rather than its own self-interests.[18] He added,

> America's ideals and values legitimize its preeminence and enable it to lead on the basis of its moral authority rather than its military might. Our authority is built on very different qualities than our power: on the attractiveness of our values, on the force of our example, on the credibility of our commitments, and on our willingness to work with and stand by others.[19]

The question confronting this country today is about whom we choose to be as Americans. People around the world will judge the path on which we embark, as well as the

destination we choose. Can the US continue its drift toward militarism and still successfully maintain Sandy Berger's lofty argument? Regardless, history illustrates that benevolence or benignancy are usually self-prescribed terms when they are used in conjunction with hegemonic power. Instead, when one state behaves arrogantly powerful, other states become fearful and unite to "balance" against it. That is, they build up their own military power and, if necessary, form alliances to create a strategic counterweight.[20]

Late last year, foreign policy expert Richard Haass stated that the fundamental question that confronts us today is how to exploit America's enormous surplus of power in the world.[21] It is ironic that he chose the verb "exploit" to frame his question. Abraham Lincoln once said,

> there are few things wholly evil or wholly good. Almost everything, especially of Government policy, is an inseparable compound of the two, so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded'[22]

However, in international relations, this compound is seldom interpreted in the same manner in different capitals. Regardless, the militarization of American foreign policy, and its implications for how the US fits into the international environment, threatens to undermine the reputation of the last, best hope for mankind.

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[18] Christopher Layne, "America's Role: What's Built Up Must Come Down," *The Washington Post*, November 14, 1999, B1-3.
[19] Ibid., B1-3.
[20] Ibid., B1-3.
[21] Richard N. Haass, "What to Do With American Primacy," *Foreign Affairs* 78 (Sep/Oct 1999: 37-49.
[22] John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 263.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Undeniably, US international interaction in the 20th century has been characterized by strong US military power. Successfully overcoming isolationist tendencies, the US twice in the last century joined a world at war in the defense of democracy and market driven capitalism. The prosperity that has accompanied liberty proves the exactitude of these ideals. However, systemic imbalances within this Republic threaten to divert it from the very ideals that led to its birth. Disarmament, isolationism, and even insulationism are the folly of fools. However, history teaches that no military hegemon has been able to prevent the eventual collapse of its military dynasty. If the US chooses not to be seen as such a hegemon, than it must arrest and reverse the processes that are fostering militarism in its foreign policy.

Consequently, both the executive and legislative branches of the US government need to embark on a program that corrects the systemic imbalances fostering militarism within the US national security apparatus. Beginning with the constitutional imbalances, the President should accept the 1988 proposal of Senator Richard G. Lugar who encouraged that the Executive and the Congressional leadership should be more creative in devising ways to include members of Congress in significant foreign-policy ventures.[23] One such approach could be legislation requiring the Department of State to begin an iterative four-year comprehensive planning and review process in conjunction with the QDR required of DoD. This Quadrennial Foreign Policy Review would foster increased cross branch dialog on the prioritization of American foreign policy goals. This approach would also reinforce the principle that foreign policy and national security policy are inextricably intertwined.

Essential to any such cooperation between the President and Congress, however, would be the commitment to not penalize the military for the magnitude of its success. Instead, Congress,

working with the White House, should devise a funding program that incrementally reestablishes balanced competition between Foggy Bottom and the Pentagon. In the case of regional diplomacy, Congress should mandate new cooperative mechanisms between the CINC's and the appropriate Assistant Secretaries of State that reinforce the idea that the State Department is responsible for regional diplomacy. In addition, Congress should begin investigating modifications to the National Security Act of 1947 that constrains the bureaucratic power of CINCs and the Joint Staff, possibly through increasingly restrictive staffing ceilings.

[23] Richard G. Lugar, *Letters to the Next President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 59 cited in Zoellick, 20-41.

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Appendix A

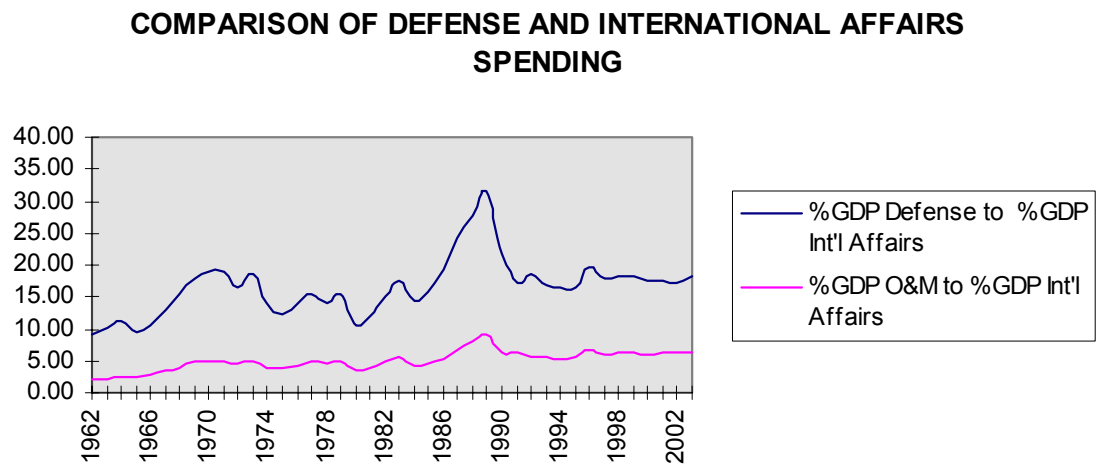

Figure 1. Graphical Comparison of the Difference Between Government Spending on Defense and International Affairs as a percentage of GDP. Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government: Historical Tables* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1998), 42-54

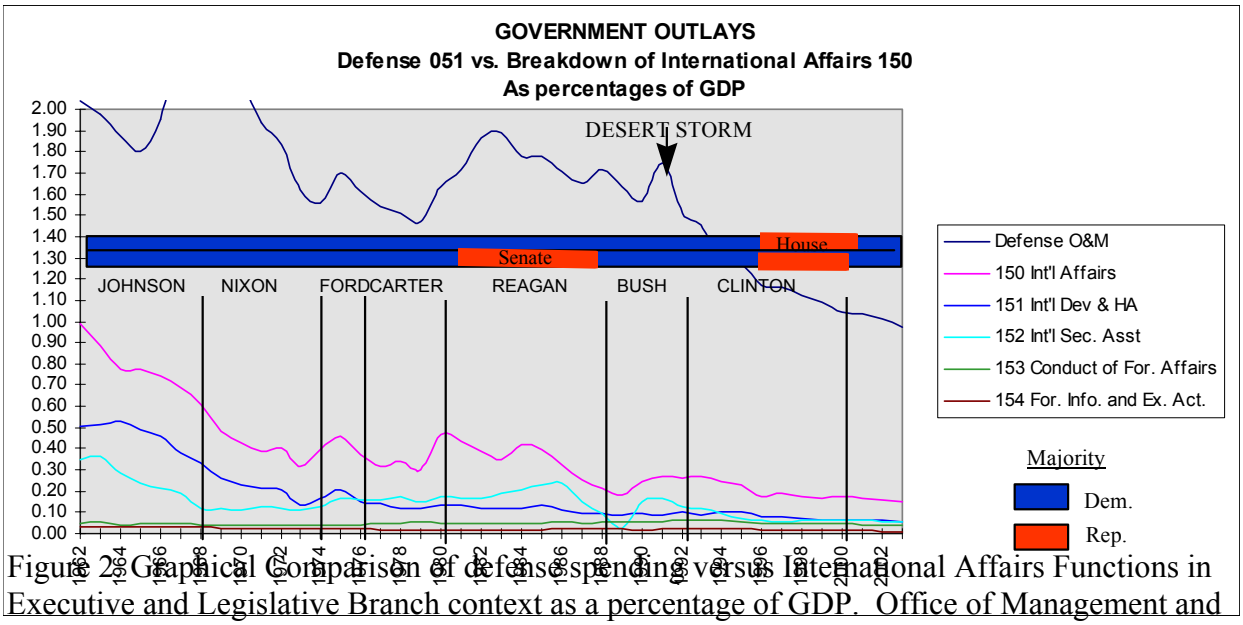

Figure 2. Graphical Comparison of defense spending versus International Affairs Functions in Executive and Legislative Branch context as a percentage of GDP. Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government*: Historical Tables (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1998), 42-54.